



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **USDA AWARDS \$338,892 IN GRANT FUNDS TO MESA STATE COLLEGE FOR DISTANCE LEARNING**

GRAND JUNCTION, Dec. 13, 2005— Mesa State College is the recipient of a \$338,892 Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant from USDA Rural Development. USDA Rural Development Acting State Director Joe Hostetler today (Dec. 13, 2005) presented Tim Foster, president of Mesa State College, with a ceremonial check.

The funds awarded will assist Mesa State in replacing the current video conferencing system with new equipment which meets regional and statewide standards. "Many people in rural areas live too far away from educational and health facilities to take full advantage of them, but new technologies can help to cover those distances. I'm pleased to support this grant for Mesa State and their partners to use video conferencing to make their programs accessible to citizens from Steamboat Springs to Montrose," said U.S. Senator Wayne Allard.

The connectivity and videoconferencing funded through this grant will provide increased access and decrease travel distances for selected western Colorado rural communities. "Congratulations to Mesa State. Rural America is too often the Forgotten America. Programs like these that can bring education, improved health care and an overall improved quality of life are critical to revitalizing our rural areas," said U.S. Senator Ken Salazar.

Mesa State estimates that more than 9,000 citizens will be served through this system by opening up access to advanced degrees in healthcare, business, and education for individuals who have already obtained their associate degrees through local programs and it will bring new opportunities for graduate degrees not previously available. "This grant is a prime example how Rural Development programs benefit rural communities. With the implementation of this system the benefits not just for Mesa State, but several institutions and many rural Colorado residents will be exponential," said Acting State Director Hostetler.

"Mesa State College and our partners, Colorado Mountain College, Colorado Northwestern Community College, Rangely District Hospital and Pioneers Hospital in Meeker; are honored to be the only Colorado recipients of this grant," said Mesa State College President Tim Foster.

"These funds mean we will be able to deliver academic classes to classes of one and two. We'll be able to bring the campus to them instead of asking them to come a long distance to the campus. It's about customer service and giving rural Coloradoans a feasible way to advance their educations and increase their earning power," Foster said.

“Because of this grant, Colorado Mountain College (CMC) will be able to offer access to junior-level and senior-level Mesa State College courses, beyond the associate degrees we currently offer,” said CMC President Dr. Bob Spuhler. “This partnership with Mesa State will allow us to better meet the educational needs within our communities by increasing our interactive video offerings.”

Participating institutions include Mesa State College and its satellite campuses in Montrose and Grand Junction; Colorado Mountain College’s Roaring Fork Campus at Spring Valley near Glenwood Springs, the Alpine Campus in Steamboat Springs, and the Vail-Eagle Valley Campus in Edwards; Colorado Northwestern Community College Campuses in Rangely and Craig; Rangely District Hospital, and Pioneers Hospital of Rio Blanco County in Meeker.

“This will enhance our mission in providing rural healthcare and educating our workforce,” said Robert Omer, Pioneers Hospital’s Chief Executive Officer.

Nationwide, over \$29.4 million was awarded to 79 projects; 35 provide funding for medical service improvements and 44 promote educational opportunities. The Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program is designed to enhance educational and health care services in rural America. This year, 227 grant applications were received and 162 met program eligibility requirements. The 79 successful applicants were selected from that list. The award to Mesa State College is the only award being made in Colorado. During the past five years, USDA's Rural Development has invested over \$4.6 billion in telecommunications programs across America.

USDA Rural Development's mission is to increase economic opportunity and improve the quality of life in rural communities. As a venture capital entity, Rural Development has invested over \$63 billion since the beginning of the Bush Administration to provide equity and technical assistance to finance and foster growth in homeownership, business development, and critical community and technology infrastructure. Over 1.1 million jobs have been created or saved through these investments. Further information on rural programs is available at a local USDA Rural Development office or by visiting Colorado’s web site at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/co/index.html>

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